

Feature Article - Continuing Professional Development

In the business world today, professionals are expected to perform a variety of different tasks and technology is playing an increasingly vital role in managing the resource intensive process of competency testing. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one way of ensuring that individuals are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge required for their particular job role.

CPD – now a mandatory requirement of many professional bodies – is also becoming more widely used within organisations, especially those keen to develop a culture of lifelong learning and performance monitoring. However the level of competency testing, and the way in which it is measured and complied with, differs greatly between such organisations.



Most systems, although diverse, fall into two categories – input driven and output driven. Input driven systems generally are based on counting the number of hours engaged in CPD activities. Frequently they are supported by a Learning Management Systems which provides a structure for the individual and monitoring information for the organisation. Output driven systems on the other hand are focused on the impact that CPD has actually had on someone's practice. They can also be self-managed by the member themselves, which allows them to develop based on the needs of the individual role.

The Institute of Continuing Professional Development (ICPD), in its recently commissioned research project 'Regulating Competencies: Is CPD Working', found that although many professions use a combination of both the input and output systems, they are increasingly turning to the more effective output systems.

This shift is largely due to the introduction of more complex personal development plans, which have been designed to be responsive to individual work requirements and ensure professionals engage in CPD and training that is most effective in supporting them in their professional duties. This not only makes CPD relevant to them, it engages them more fully in the learning process.

However, with the migration to output driven systems, the study found that some professional bodies are finding it increasingly difficult to implement an effective system of compliance within their organisation. This is primarily due to a lack of resources – output driven systems have traditionally needed considerable resources to monitor continually and properly.

There are now however a number of web-based solutions available which have made the output model a viable option. The advantage of using web-based systems is that they are extremely "light touch" and require little upfront investment or in-house technical resources.

For example, the Society College of Radiographers (SCOR) has implemented an output based system for its 19,000 members, most of whom are employed by the NHS. With only one full time CPD officer, an electronic solution was the only viable way to ensure members were complying to the Society's professional standards and to provide them with a flexible and easy to use portfolio which they could use to demonstrate their competence to employers and regulators. This is equally true of the corporate environment, and Sun Life has used a similar system to ensure its financial advisors comply with the latest industry legislation and can operate to the highest standards within a highly regulated market sector.

The message, as reinforced by the ICPD research finding is clear. Output based learning is the most effective for any form of performance testing. What industry needs to do now is embrace the technology available to realise the benefits it can bring.

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Founded in 1997 Axia Interactive Media specialises in providing internet based solutions to support lifelong learning and development. Its customers include the Royal College of Nursing, Learn Direct, Council for Administration, Society College of Radiographers, Institute of Forestry and the Royal Society of Archaeologists. Axia's Now.Net technology enables professional associations to implement an effective and efficient output based CPD system, regardless of size and resource constraints, with no requirement for technology development.

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